CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

The one idea which is common to the entire Indian Philosophical tradition is the pursuit of mokṣa as the final goal. Mokṣa may be known by other names such as Kaivalya, mukti, nirvāṇa, apavarga, etc., but in the generic sense, it denotes 'freedom'. It may be freedom from the chain of birth and death, freedom from suffering, freedom from attachment, freedom from ignorance and non-discriminative knowledge. It is also regarded as the highest goal - the summum bonum of human life. The impact of the idea of mokṣa was so strong in Indian tradition that no serious study is said to be complete without reference to mokṣa as its final goal be it grammar, aesthetics, socio-politics or morality. But the task of exploring its meaning as well the means and methods of attaining mokṣa is left to philosophy (darṣana Śāstra) which is otherwise known as mokṣa Śāstra. For other subjects, the reference to mokṣa was needed either to elevate the status of the subject to the level of a Śāstra (authentic work in a field of study) or else as a mark of reverence for the tradition. But it is evident that the idea of mokṣa
occupied an important place in the philosophical discussions of the ancient and medieval India. So it is no wonder that many interpreters and thinkers strongly feel that mokṣa is the focal point of Indian philosophical thought. Whether their conviction is true or not is a matter of debate, but this view has evoked two types of extreme reactions about the nature of Indian Philosophy as a whole. Either people have been fascinated by its spiritual overtones or else it has been dismissed as religion and mysticism. In view of such radically opposite estimation, a cool and dispassionate understanding of the concept of mokṣa becomes mandatory. In my work I have decided to concentrate on the vedānta theories of mokṣa, because this concept is inalienably connected with their epistemological, metaphysical and ethical stand points. In this introductory chapter I will like to discuss some of the problems associated with the misconceptions about the nature of Indian philosophy arising out of the presupposition that the Philosophical thought of this land is essentially mokṣa-centric.
Etymologically speaking, the term mokṣa is derived from the root 'moks' which means 'to be free from'. So mokṣa means to be free from the cycle of birth and death and consequently from all kinds of worldly sufferings and pain. This shows that mokṣa, as a concept is directly connected with the problems of life and the solution of such maladies. Once the idea of mokṣa, is projected as the focal point of philosophy, Western thinkers take no time to jump to the conclusion that in India there was no philosophy, in the proper sense of the term. W.T. Stace in his book *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy* very categorically states, “the roots of Indian thought lie in the anxiety of the individual to escape from ills and calamities of existence. This is not scientific, but the practical spirit. It gives birth to religions, but not to Philosophies”. Now, what is the basis of such an off-hand remark? Prof. Stace would say Indian Philosophy is "Content with symbols and metaphors in place of rational

From the above remark two things become clear: (1) India never had any serious thought, which could be called philosophy; and (2) The concern of ancient Indians about the problems of life is a matter of practice—hence it is a part of religion. I shall like to deal with these two ideas one by one.

First, should we attribute the title 'Philosophy' to the Indian way of doing philosophy? In the context of the notion of Philosophy prevalent in the Western tradition, many find it difficult to offer the status of Philosophy to the vast literature, generally known as Indian Philosophy. In the Western traditions philosophy means rational explanation and intellectual deliberation. It is no wonder that David Hume in his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, tells us that Indian Philosophy is profane because it compares God with a spider which creates cobwebs out of itself. It seems, he was acquainted with some Eighteenth Century account of the Upaniṣadic lines where Brahma is compared with a spider. Even Locke passes ironic

---

2. Ibid., p.15.
remarks about a subject called 'Indian Philosophy'. But we can understand the bias Hume or Locke had, regarding the subject called 'Indian philosophy'. During their time most of the Indian Classical treatises were not translated into European Languages. But W.T. Stace seems to show an amount of impatience in his zeal to discard any thing non-European as worthless. But what shocks us most is the remark of Anthony Flew, who does not hesitate to dismiss Indian philosophy as late as 1971, when Indological study is no more an unknown area. In his book _An Introduction to Western Philosophy_ he says "... Philosophy, as the word is understood here is concerned first, last and all the time with _argument_. It is incidentally, because most of what is labelled as _Eastern Philosophy_ is not so concerned rather than any reason of European parochialism - that this book draws no materials from any source east of suez". Unfortunately, it is a sort of 'parochialism' which impels, Flew, Stace and many others to launch such an offensive against anything 'Eastern' and specially Indian. To discard

any view one need to go thoroughly about the pros and cons in detail. Unfortunately, no such pain is undertaken by these thinkers. Any body who has some idea of what very broadly Indian Philosophy is all about, knows that no theory, be it ontological, epistemological or even ethical and soteriological is presented in a dogmatic manner without offering any rational justification. No Indian philosophical work is complete without countering the possible objections against the protagonist's arguments.

"This is what philosophical activities consist in argument and counter argument, pakṣa and pratipakṣa- and this is what philosophers in India did all the time. The very format of philosophical writing demanded that one present the counter-position, the purva - pakṣa first and, only after refuting it, establish one's position". Argument (Flew) and rational explanation (Stace), if are the hallmark of philosophy then Indian tradition has them in plenty.

4. Daya Krishna : Indian Philosophy : A Counter Perspective (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.41-42.
We now come to the second point raised by Stace regarding the nature of Indian Philosophy. He says that the Indian thought is concerned with practice. "The ideal of knowledge for its own sake is rarely to be found. Knowledge is desired merely as a means towards salvation". It is a well known fact that most of the systems of Indian Philosophy projected the worldly life as full of suffering and pain. So there is an inherent anxiety to escape from the ills and calamities of existence. If discussing the problems of existence at physical, psychological and social plane 'turns a theory into 'practice' then half of the Western philosophers commit the same mistake. For most of the Western philosophers devoted quite some attention to the nature of state, government, law and the problems arising out of them. Inspite of Aristotle's hints that politics was a practical science, the subsequent philosophers did not hesitate to discuss them. And such discussions are taken to be a significant part of their philosophy, as there was, often a close link between their

metaphysical stand-point and political theory. So it is obvious that there is nothing wrong with the serious and critical thinking concerning the issues of life. But the basic reason behind the view that in India there was no distinction between religion and philosophy may be the use of the word 'salvation', as a translation of mokṣa. "Salvation" means "deliverance from sin and its consequences and admission to heaven". But unfortunately the term mokṣa does not have such connotations. Besides, in case of most of the philosophical systems 'mokṣa' or its synonyms are not at all connected with the idea of 'God' or 'heaven'. Śaṅkara's conception of mokṣa, Buddhistic theory of nirvāṇa are in no sense theo-centric. Therefore, it is sheer injustice to say that 'Indian philosophy' cannot be and should not be called philosophy proper. A great deal of philosophical discussion in India deals with metaphysical, epistemological and logical questions. Such deliberations are as critical and as rigorous as Western philosophy. In fact there is another term anviksiki often used for such

critical thinking. But many modern thinkers who have been influenced by the logical positivism and analytical tradition question the application of the term 'philosophy' to what is known as *darsana*, in India. For them, *darsana*, has "a practical end in view, namely ultimate freedom from *dukha* and to that extent the discipline called *darsana* is saturated with soteriology and religious fervour, while 'philosophy' as an academic discipline is devoted to pure pursuit of knowledge thought analysis of concepts, meanings, etc." 7 There is a grain of truth in this allegation. The Indian conception of *darsana* as 'intuitive insight' is not exclusively academic philosophy, though academic philosophy in the strict sense of the term, is a part of this. And as far as *darsana* is concerned, the inclusion of idea of *moksha* makes it soteriological and in certain specific cases religious. But there is no sharp dichotomy of facts and values, theory and practice in Indian tradition, (similarly in Western tradition philosophy originally implied 'wisdom' and not

academic philosophy in the analytical sense of the term). In traditional works of India four main branches of study are frequently mentioned. They are scriptures (Śruti), agro-economy (vārtā), state-craft (dandaniti) and philosophy and logic (ānviṣikī). Some philosophers included adhyātma vidyā (spiritual knowledge) within ānviṣikī. But the modern scholars of philosophy sometimes find it anomalous to include critical philosophy and soteriological concerns within the same fold. In this case, one of the arguments referred to by B.K. Matilal seems to be particularly significant. He points out, "Darśana is actually a study of prameyas (the 'objects' of knowledge) according to different philosophical 'points of view'. It is therefore concerned with different metaphysical and soteriological systems." But Indian philosophers also included the study of pramāṇas (method of knowledge and much else besides) within the fold of their discussions. And they did not find it incongruous to discuss metaphysics, soteriology and epistemology under one subject. Whether one is convinced by such argument or not,

it remains a fact that critical discussion about the nature of knowledge, language and meaning existed side by side with the metaphysical and soteriological discussions.

The third problem that confronts us is the label 'spiritual', which is often attached to Indian thought in general. Here again the presupposition is, mokṣa-centric about the nature of its philosophical literature. The concept mokṣa, as it is understood in the Indian context is not practical in the Kantian sense. It is not something connected with morality or human action. First and foremost, Indian philosophers talked of mokṣa "in the context of knowledge of what truth is, and knowledge in this case being of the self ensures or rather coincides with its own reality, that is, the real nature of the self".9 Acceptance of such a view cannot be called spiritual, as it is ordinarily understood in Western philosophy. Whether a philosophy is spiritual or not is largely determined by its answer to the question about the

reality of matter. It is not determined by its answer to the question about the supreme end which human beings ought to pursue. Not all the systems of India deny the reality of matter. It is not also spiritualistic in the sense that it is God-centric, for most of the systems are not of such nature. If by spiritualism we mean non-rational and dogmatic acceptance of certain truths, then also it is not spiritual. But if by spiritualism one refers to the quest for transcending all sorts of empirical dualities and conflicts and a quest for the ultimate knowledge then some of the schools of Indian thought are definitely spiritual in nature. There is nothing wrong with the word 'spiritual' if it is understood in the right perspective, in the context of Indian culture and philosophy. Besides, the whole attitude of putting such labels as 'practical' 'religious', 'spiritual' etc. to Indian philosophy seems to stem from the idea that the word stands for a uniform set of views. One has to accept that philosophical thought in India encompasses a mosaic of view-points and its multituddeness cannot be put into a straight jacket.
One more misconception about the nature of Indian philosophy should be clarified, as it is connected with the idea of mokṣa as the summum bonum of life. It has been often pointed out that Indian philosophers underestimate the role of morality in order to emphasize the importance of mokṣa. R.C. Zaehner, for example, argues in his book *our savage God* that, "there is a moral ambivalence in these thoughts so deep-seated that it may lead to disastrous results in our everyday behaviour". The mokṣa-centric approach of vedānta and some other systems and placing of mokṣa as a higher value than morality in the hierarchy of value scheme, (puruṣārthas), may create such an impression. But no philosophy in India, especially vedāntins, ever suggested that the good-evil, right-wrong distinction should be abandoned. "Rather it was always emphasized that one cannot gain liberating knowledge without having lived a perfectly moral life".

---


Reality - the cosmic consciousness of good-evil distinction loses its significance.

Now we come to discuss the most crucial issue. This is about the relevance of writing a thesis on a concept which may appear to be obsolete in the present day social context. *Mokṣa* as a goal is concerned with the ultimate quest of man as a living being. But the concept of *man* has undergone a great change with the advent of science. Science emphasises on rationality, objectivity and value-neutrality. Therefore, the moral and spiritual issues are relegated to the background. The man is conceived to be a rational and intellectual being aiming at material prosperity and mastering of the nature. The material comforts that science and technology have offered him leaves little scope for the yearning for the self-realisation. Under such circumstances what is the need for discussing the question of *mokṣa*? It may turn out to be a futile examination of the dead and mummified past, unless we can show the relevance of *mokṣa* as a living issue. It seems that the entire idea of dismissing *mokṣa* is based on
a wrong conception of the relation between science and spirituality. The modern scientists are more and more convinced that spirituality, in the sense of the quest for the ultimate truth is not opposed to the spirit of science. Science has in recent times turned its attention from the external to the internal. It has realised that after a particular point the nature of the quest becomes similar to that of philosophy. I shall be discussing the relation between rationality and spirituality, science and religion in a separate chapter. But for the time being we can sum up that the man in Indian culture is never taken to be a calculating robot. He has other aspects which are as important as rationality. Swami Ranganathânanda rightly points out that in Vedântic philosophy the life is considered in its wholeness. *Its theme is Man - Man in search of fullness of truth, beauty and goodness. Part of this search is in external world: but the most significant part of this search lies in the internal world: the first gives social welfare through the application of physical and social sciences: the second gives spiritual freedom
through the discipline of morality and religion.\textsuperscript{12}

However modern and rational the man may claim himself to be, man cannot avoid his quest for spirituality and morality. In the name of science the spirituality may not be discussed in academic circles but the need is manifested in a wrong way in our social life, thought, religious fundamentalism and dogmatic sectarianism. It is high time that we should admit the importance of man's non-rational and value-centric aspects of life and examine whether \textit{mokṣa} as an ideal can make the life of a man more complete and fulfilling.

In my present work I have decided to concentrate on Vedānta system only. The reason for this may be stated as follows. Though \textit{mokṣa} and synonymous concepts play a dominant role in most of the systems of Indian philosophy, it is not the focal concept in all cases. The Vedāntic conception of the world, reality, knowledge and morality

are founded on the ideal of mokṣa. This is why I plan to concentrate on Vedānta system. The entire Vedānta literature draws its contents from Goudapāda’s Brahmaṇaṭra. But different philosophers have interpreted the aphorisms in accordance with their own metaphysical predilection. So accordingly the concept of mokṣa is viewed in different ways by different Vedāntins. In my work, I have chosen to discuss the ideas of five eminent exponents of Vedāntic system. They are Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Vallabha and Madhva. My discussion in these chapters do not cover all aspects of their philosophy. I have only examined their concepts of bondage, world, mokṣa and the path to mokṣa. Before undertaking the task of explaining different Vedāntic ways of looking at mokṣa, I have tried to chalk out, in brief, the nature and scope of mokṣa and its multiple implications. The concluding chapter will focus on the relevance of mokṣa in the modern era.